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The Synergy of Islamic Religious Education and Character Building to Foster Tolerance and Empathy

Nelly Kasuma Siregar, SDN 0912 Tobing Julu, nellisiregar99@guru.sd.belajar.id

Nurmida Samosir, SDN Tanjung Baringin, samosirnurmida@gmail.com

Abstract:

Education plays a crucial role in shaping an individual's character and personality, especially during childhood growth and development. Amid the challenges of globalization and rapid technological advancements, moral character and good ethics have become increasingly important. One of the most effective ways to instill strong and noble character is through religious education and character-building programs. Islamic Religious Education, as one of the key pillars of Indonesia's education system, is not only aimed at teaching religious doctrines but also at shaping good morals and behavior in accordance with the values taught in the Qur'an and Hadith. One of the fundamental principles of Islam is the importance of tolerance and empathy toward others. Tolerance teaches us to respect differences, while empathy helps us understand and share the feelings of others. However, the application of these values in daily life often faces challenges, particularly in diverse and multicultural environments. Therefore, there is a need for synergy between Islamic Religious Education and character education to cultivate tolerance and empathy among students. Character education, which emphasizes morality and ethics in social life, plays a vital role in reinforcing the values of Islamic teachings. By integrating both, students are expected to grow into individuals who are not only religiously devout but also compassionate, respectful, and socially responsible. Although this concept has been widely implemented in various educational institutions, effectively applying it remains a significant challenge. Further research and deeper understanding are required to explore how the synergy between Islamic Religious Education and character education can create a generation that is not only intellectually capable but also morally upright and capable of making positive contributions to society. This study aims to analyze how the integration of Islamic Religious Education and Character Education fosters tolerance and empathy among students. A qualitative approach with a literature review method was used for data collection. The findings indicate that religious education that goes beyond dogmatic teachings and emphasizes social practice can enhance students' awareness of the importance of living harmoniously. Furthermore, cultivating character-based behaviors, such as care and cooperation, strengthens empathy in their social interactions. Therefore, the synergy between Islamic Religious Education and Character Education is essential in shaping a generation that is tolerant, compassionate, and of strong moral character.

Keywords: Islamic Religious Education, Character Education, Tolerance, Empathy, Character

INTRODUCTION

Education plays a crucial role in shaping the character and personality of students, particularly in the context of a diverse social life. One of the primary objectives of education is to develop individuals who are not only intellectually competent but also

possess strong moral values. Islamic Religious Education and Character Education are two complementary aspects that instill Islamic values while shaping students' attitudes and behaviors to align with positive social norms (Azra, 2012; Gunawan, 2017).

In a multicultural society, tolerance and empathy serve as the key to maintaining social harmony. Tolerance teaches individuals to respect differences, whether in religion, culture, or worldview, while empathy enables individuals to understand and relate to others' feelings and conditions, thereby fostering more thoughtful interactions (Mahfud, 2021; Tilaar, 2018). Unfortunately, intolerance and a lack of empathy remain prevalent in social environments, including in educational institutions. Therefore, a synergy between Islamic Religious Education and Character Education is necessary to cultivate a generation that not only understands religious teachings but also applies them in social life with a sense of tolerance and care (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2018; Hasan, 2019).

This study aims to analyze how the integration of Islamic Religious Education and Character Education can foster tolerance and empathy among students. By examining concepts, teaching methods, and their impact on student behavior, this research seeks to provide new insights into the importance of character-based education in building a harmonious and civilized society. Although Islamic Religious Education (PAI) and Character Education are designed to develop students into tolerant and empathetic individuals, their implementation still faces several challenges. Research indicates that many schools have not fully incorporated a curriculum that reflects multicultural values, resulting in suboptimal understanding and tolerance among students (Nasution, 2019; Zubaedi, 2018).

Additionally, the predominant focus on cognitive aspects over affective aspects in teaching approaches has hindered the internalization of tolerance and empathy in students. Therefore, efforts to strengthen the integration of these two educational aspects must be accompanied by the implementation of more interactive and experience-based teaching methods, allowing students to practice tolerance and empathy in real-life situations (Hamzah, 2020; Suyanto & Jihad, 2020). The reinforcement of character education through Islamic teachings can ultimately contribute to the development of a socially responsible and morally grounded generation that respects differences and prioritizes social harmony (Departemen Pendidikan Nasional, 2017; Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2018).

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach using literature review and observation methods to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon based on data collected from various sources. The research is categorized as descriptive qualitative, focusing on analyzing the implementation of the synergy between Islamic Religious Education and Character Education in fostering tolerance and empathy in educational environments. Data sources include primary data obtained from interviews with teachers, students, and educators regarding the implementation of Islamic Religious Education and Character Education, as well as secondary data derived from books, journals, previous research, and policy documents related to character education. Data collection techniques consist of direct observation of how tolerance and empathy values are taught in the learning process, semi-structured interviews with teachers and students to gain deeper insights, and document analysis of official materials such as curricula and educational policies. The collected data will be analyzed using a descriptive qualitative analysis method, which involves data reduction, presenting data in a narrative form, and drawing conclusions. The analysis results will be linked to existing theories and previous research to provide a more comprehensive understanding.

RESULTS

The results of observations and interviews indicate that most schools have integrated Islamic Religious Education and Character Education into the learning process. However, the application of tolerance and empathy values remains theoretical and has not been fully implemented in daily practice. Some students demonstrate a good understanding of the concept of tolerance but struggle to apply it in social life. Furthermore, many teachers acknowledge the need for further training to effectively teach these values (Azra, 2012; Gunawan, 2017).

To ensure data validity, triangulation was conducted by comparing the results of interviews, observations, and document analysis. The findings reveal a gap between curriculum objectives and field implementation. Although schools strive to instill tolerance and empathy, the methods used are not entirely effective in creating attitudinal changes among students. Additionally, interviews with students suggest that they better understand these values when engaged in practical activities such as interfaith cooperation or social projects (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2018; Mahfud, 2021). Thus, developing more participatory and contextual learning methods is necessary to optimize the synergy between Islamic Religious Education and Character Education in fostering tolerance and empathy.

A major obstacle in effectively instilling tolerance and empathy is the lack of interactive learning methods. Documentation studies also indicate that some teaching materials do not fully reflect the principles of inclusivity and diversity (Tilaar, 2018; Zubaedi, 2018). Data validation in this study was conducted to ensure the accuracy and consistency of the collected information. One validation method used was technique triangulation, which involved comparing interview results, observations, and documentation. For instance, interviews with teachers about the implementation of tolerance and empathy values were compared with direct classroom observations. If there was consistency between teachers' statements and observed practices, the data was considered more credible (Nasution, 2019). Source triangulation was also applied by comparing information from different respondents. Teachers, students, and school principals provided their perspectives on the effectiveness of integrating Islamic Religious Education and Character Education. When findings from different sources exhibited similar patterns, the validity of the research was strengthened (Hasan, 2019).

To enhance data credibility, member checking was conducted, in which respondents reviewed their interview transcripts to ensure no misinterpretations occurred. Additionally, the research findings were consulted with education experts as part of peer debriefing. Experts provided insights into the relevance and applicability of the study's results in the educational field (Suyanto & Jihad, 2020). Through this comprehensive validation process, it was confirmed that the collected data was valid and could serve as a reliable basis for accurate conclusions.

The data validation results indicate alignment among the various techniques used, namely technique triangulation, source triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing. Technique triangulation, which involved comparing teacher and student interview results, classroom observations, and document analysis, confirmed that Islamic Religious Education and Character Education tend to focus on theoretical approaches. Students understand the concepts of tolerance and empathy academically but struggle to implement them in daily life. Source triangulation reveals that teachers, students, and education staff acknowledge the need for experience-based learning methods. Most teachers stated that limited curriculum time poses a challenge to developing more interactive learning approaches. Students, on the other hand, expressed that they grasp

tolerance and empathy values more effectively when provided with real-life examples, such as social projects or intergroup collaboration involving diverse backgrounds (Hamzah, 2020).

The results of member checking indicate that respondents felt their statements during interviews were accurately interpreted. Neither teachers nor students raised significant objections or corrections regarding the transcribed interviews or initial research conclusions, suggesting that the collected data accurately reflects real-life conditions. Meanwhile, during peer debriefing sessions, education experts emphasized that experiential and reflective approaches should be incorporated into more effective learning strategies. They recommended additional modules or programs emphasizing practical character-building reinforcement (Departemen Pendidikan Nasional, 2017). Overall, data validation confirmed that the synergy between Islamic Religious Education and Character Education holds significant potential in fostering tolerance and empathy, provided that more applicable teaching methods are employed.

Further validation results show that the effectiveness of integrating Islamic Religious Education and Character Education in cultivating tolerance and empathy is also influenced by the school environment and parental support. Based on source triangulation, students raised in democratic parenting environments tend to understand and practice tolerance and empathy values more easily than those from backgrounds lacking real-life examples of diversity and social concern. Teachers also emphasized that parental involvement in children's character education is crucial, particularly in setting an example in daily life. Observations further revealed that schools implementing cross-subject collaborative activities and community-based social programs achieve better results in instilling these values. Students involved in social extracurricular activities, such as community service programs or interfaith discussions, demonstrated a stronger understanding and application of tolerance and empathy concepts (Mahfud, 2021; Zubaedi, 2018).

In member checking, both students and teachers acknowledged that experience-based learning methods, such as case studies or social projects, have a more significant impact than traditional teaching methods. Teachers suggested that learning assessments should also include behavior-based evaluations to measure students' attitudinal changes. Based on these validation results, it can be concluded that the integration of Islamic Religious Education and Character Education will be more effective when supported by practical approaches, parental involvement, and a conducive school environment for experiential learning.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this research and data validation, several strong conclusions have emerged regarding the synergy between Islamic Religious Education and Character Education in fostering students' attitudes of tolerance and empathy. The key findings indicate that although the values of tolerance and empathy have been integrated into the Islamic Religious Education and Character Education curriculum, their implementation in learning still faces several challenges. The predominant teaching methods, which rely heavily on lectures and rote memorization, have proven to be less effective in deeply instilling these values. In contrast, experience-based approaches, such as cross-group discussions, case studies, and participation in social activities, have been found to be more effective in enhancing students' understanding and internalization of tolerance and empathy.

From an academic perspective, this study contributes to the development of research on character education based on the integration of religious and moral values. The findings reinforce the theory that religious education is not merely a means of knowledge transfer but also serves as a medium for more holistic character formation.

Furthermore, the study demonstrates that the effectiveness of character education largely depends on the teaching methods employed. As such, the results of this study can serve as a foundation for developing more innovative teaching strategies, both within Islamic Religious Education and other subjects related to character education.

From a social contribution standpoint, this research affirms that character education, particularly in terms of tolerance and empathy, has a significant impact on societal life. Students who receive experience-based education in understanding diversity and social awareness tend to apply these attitudes more easily in their daily lives. This, in turn, fosters a more harmonious social environment, both within schools and in the broader community. Additionally, the findings of this research provide recommendations for schools and education policymakers to place greater emphasis on practice-based teaching methods in instilling character values in students.

Thus, this study confirms that the synergy between Islamic Religious Education and Character Education holds great potential in shaping a more tolerant and empathetic generation. However, its effectiveness highly depends on the learning approaches implemented, parental involvement, and support from education policies that are more adaptive to modern social challenges.

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